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ABSTRACT

After a brief introduction offering three reasons people and institutions hesitate to commit themselves to a continuing process of "self-study-in-action," four types of administrative leadership activities are distinguished, those that: (1) respond to external emergencies/opportunities, (2) accomplish role-defined tasks, (3) define and implement a major initiative, and (4) encourage institutional self-study. A detailed description of the first year of the self-study process at Boston College's School of Management (Massachusetts) is presented, including a summary of three initial faculty research seminars, a discussion of postseminar "effectiveness" interviews, an examination of the validity of the feedback process, and an outline of the collaborative inquiry model of science. A subsequent discussion of the self-study process's second year provides a progress report on the newly implemented core curriculum and describes one particular "Integrative Activity" session that focused on the business management program's ability to generate an institutional environment that is inquiring, responsible, and effective. The long-term commitment needed to successfully establish a program of institutional self-study and collaborative inquiry is also emphasized. (JBM)

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Action Research in Management

The role of self-study in improving managerial and institutional effectiveness

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This paper reports the conceptual framework for, and the initial activities of, an institutional self-study at a school of management.

The general claim is that any administrator optimally exercises and balances four kinds of leadership, of which one kind is encouraging a continuing institutional self-study process. The argument is that contining self-study is necessary if any institution is to become increasingly effective over the long run (7–21 years).

Keywords: Institutional self-study, effectiveness, leadership, collaborative inquiry, timing, feedback processes, models of inquiry, responsible self-regulation, organizational politics, implementation

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1. Introduction

I entered my current role as an associate dean responsible for the Graduate Division of the Boston College School of Management after eighteen years of research and practice seeking to relate timely inquiry to effective action through a process of continuing personal and institutional self-study. Through these efforts [14,16,18] I had persuaded myself that there *is* a process of personal and institutional self-study-in-the-midst-of-action which can increase managerial and institutional effectiveness over time. Moreover, I had come to believe that such a real-time self-study process in the midst of the pressures and anxieties of everyday work and leisure may well be the key to non-violent personal and institutional change toward more just societies [15,17]. Consequently, I was prepared to make a major commitment to personal and institutional self-study as a valuable activity for the Boston College Graduate School of Management, both in terms of its teaching and its research functions.

At the same time, my commitment to personal and institutional self-study-in-action was tempered by my awareness that the notion and practice of self-study can only gradually introduce itself and 'prove' (or disprove) itself through the experience of each new person or institution that experiments with a self-study process. Indeed, I had come to realize how improbable it is that many people and institutions will commit themselves deeply to a continuing real-time self-study because:

(1) such a self-study process requires a managerial style which integrates inquiry with advocacy, but few managers today cultivate such a style [2];

(2) such a self-study process requires methods of inquiry which yield data that are timely for, and usable by, the system studied and which enhance its commitment to continuing inquiry, but few social scientists today cultivate such methods [8,9]; and

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(3) such a self-study process requires a long-term commitment if it is to become institutionalized, but the very mobility of today's professional and managerial classes, as well as the disappearance of symbols of authority which command enduring allegiance, militate against *any* long-term commitments, let alone a long-term commitment to a self-study process the benefits of which must initially seem intangible and ambiguous.

2. Four kinds of administrative leadership

My commitment as an administrator, teacher, and researcher to cultivate institutional self-study is obviously in tension with my belief that many other members of any system I join are unlikely to place the same high priority on such a process. Acknowledging this tension has led me to a conception of administrative leadership which now helps me to allocate my work time among different kinds of demands. This conception also suggests how self-study can relate to all of the other valued activities that claim anyone's time and attention. This conception of administrative leadership distinguishes among four different time-spans of leadership. It names the resulting broad types of leadership activities as follows:

(1) *Responding to external emergencies/opportunities* (which may arise unexpectedly at any moment);

(2) *Accomplishing role-defined tasks* (which tend to arise and be completed within a one-week to one-year time frame);

(3) *Defining and implementing a major initiative* (which requires on the order of 3–5 years); and

(4) *Encouraging institutional self-study* (which is best imagined as requiring 7–21 years, or a generation, because of the gradual process by which people determine the value of self-study for themselves and their institutions and also because institutional self-study is the continuing background from which truly timely and appropriate new major initiatives can come into focus).

Because these four time spans interpenetrate one another and influence each other, effective management over any extended period of time requires juggling and balancing all four kinds of leadership all the time. (Indeed, on closer observation, each of the four kinds of leadership has both long-term and short-term qualities, e.g., there will be occasions when the success of the longest-term aims depends upon one's immediate response to an unexpected opportunity.) Because tasks relating to the two short-term kinds of leadership are more 'externally' determined at any given time, while the two long-term kinds of leadership are more 'internally' determined (if they are being exercised at all), demands relating to the different kinds of leadership can be in considerable tension with each other. If a leader is at all passive in structuring time, the more immediate, more external demands will gain pre-eminence. On the other hand, if over time a leader actively juggles and balances the four kinds of leadership, one would expect the demands of each time-span increasingly to complement and support activities relating to the other three.

If an administrator fails to perform effectively in regard to the two shorter-term time spans, he or she comes to be regarded as unhelpful and unrealistic ('incredible'). If an administrator fails to perform effectively in regard to the two longer-term time spans, the organization does not redesign or restructure itself to meet new environmental contingencies or to more nearly achieve its foundational purposes. Any given 'major initiative' involves restructuring a specific part of an institution, while the self-study process involves a continuing clarification and reformulation of purposes along with a continuing testing for possible incongruities among purposes, structures, practices, and outcomes which may suggest areas requiring restructuring.

Because I believe that today's institutions increasingly require a self-restructuring capacity, given their turbulent political and economic environment, and because I believe that schools of management can powerfully support students' development of self-restructuring personal learning strategies only if the schools themselves demonstrate – not just in their rhetoric, but in their daily operations – the plausibility and efficacy of self-restructuring processes, I wished at this stage in my career to join a school open to such development.

3. Entry

In choosing my current position, I evaluated Boston College in terms of its current posture with regard to each of the four kinds of activity described above. The three most important 'facts' that emerged for me were:

(1) that the Graduate School of Management was

on the brink of a major restructuring of its MBA core curriculum with the Dean's support;

(2) that the university as a whole, founded and still led by the Jesuit Order, recognized, by intuition and experience, the possibility and desirability of relating knowledge to action through a morally consequential communal self-study; and

(3) that the Dean himself, my immediate superior, seemed open – not in a rhetorical sense, but in a behavioral sense – to a real-time collaborative inquiry – to a mutual self-study process – in our ongoing meetings.

As a candidate for the Associate Deanship, I had approached my first meeting with the Dean wondering: Could our relationship microscopically model a process of collaborative inquiry – a mutual self-study-in-action? Would he be playful enough to be able simultaneously to confront me, to support me, and to ridicule me in regard to this aim over a period of years? Only under these conditions could I imagine the possibility of working toward a more extended institutionalization of a self-study process over the long term:

> Within five minutes of meeting the Dean of the school, I knew that he would be such a superior, and twenty months of working with him have confirmed my judgment. My initial judgment was based on the fact that within five minutes we were already laughing, scheming, sharing our favorite books, and irreverently probing one another's deepest convictions about management. The confirmations of this judgment come from the repeated experience that our many differences complement each other or form productive tensions rather than inhibiting our performances. These differences include background variables such as class, religion, and academic discipline (his discipline is operations research); they also include differences in managerial style, such as my bringing agendas to our meetings, whereas he brings none at all, or such as my bias toward public communication through memos and group meetings as contrasted to his bias toward private one-on-one conversations; and the differences between us also include differences in ultimate beliefs about institutions: whereas I believe in the possibility of transforming institutions so that they can, in turn, much more regularly and powerfully exercise transforming, humanizing influences on their members; he is an institutional minimalist who hopes at best to curb some of the negative consequences of this one institution, to make it a little better place to be, and who does not believe in the efficacy of strategic planning or public rhetoric. Even when these differences between us bring us into public opposition to one another, as would only be healthy at some point, we will each have pricked one another's dreams so many times that I imagine us inwardly enjoying the joke of our newest and subtlest conspiracy as we outwardly struggle to the death without a hint of mercy or fraternity.

In stepping back from this brief evocation of my relationship to the dean of the school, let me make two final points about it. First, in functioning as a microcosmic (and undoubtedly incomplete) community of inquiry, this relationship symbolizes how, in creating a community of inquiry, the means must be congruent with the end, how local idiosyncrasy will flavor each distinct experiment toward such a community (for surely no other superior-subordinate will be similar to this one in terms of the particulars), and how central to this ideal is the cultivation of civilizing conflict. Second, on the basis of my description of this relationship, you should not be surprised if the Dean absolutely denies the validity of my characterization of it.

4. First year of the self-study process

During my first seven months as Associate Dean, my work concentrated on various emergencies, on learning my new role and the priorities of other 'players' in the system, and on laying the ground work for a major revision of the MBA curriculum. Only then did I formally introduce the notion of studying our own managerial and organizational effectiveness to the school's faculty at a series of three informal research seminars in June of 1979. Some 25 of 60 full-time faculty members attended one or more of these seminars, and at their conclusion 13 members of the faculty (everyone present at the third seminar) agreed to participate in a round of semi-structured interviews intended to explore:

(1) how their academic field defines effectiveness;

(2) how they view the school's effectiveness;

(3) how they view their own professional effectiveness; and

(4) whether these different perspectives on effectiveness match or clash.

(The interview schedule and results are available upon request.)

A feedback session on the results in late July led to two proposals:

(1) to do a second round of interviews with a wider sample of the faculty;

(2) to hold a series of informal faculty meetings during the year in order

(a) to discuss further research results,

(b) to explore future directions for the School of Management, and

(c) more simply, to encourage cross-departmen-

tal, cross-rank socializing among the faculty.

Two of the original participants joined me as interviewers in a second round of interviews which occurred in December 1979, and three other faculty members joined me in planning the informal faculty meetings. A second round of written feedback on a total of 36 interviews was sent to all faculty in March of 1980, with two voluntary feedback sessions in April in which 20 faculty participated.

The three initial faculty research seminars introduced models of inquiry and effectiveness which can be summarized briefly as follows.

By contrast to the currently-best-articulated model of research – the hypothetico-deductive model which divides the world in two (researcher/subject, theory/data, map/territory) – the model of collaborative inquiry which has evolved through my previous work divides the world in four and fosters disciplined self-study on both the personal and institutional scale by both the initiating researcher(s) and other participants. Both personal self-study and institutional self-study are conceived as focusing on at least four differentiable territories:

(1) the visible, outside world;

(2) one's own action as sensed by oneself in the process of acting;

(3) the mapping process itself, the world of thinking; and

(4) the attention, which can focus on any of the other three territories, or encompass all, including its own dynamics, at once (see Table 1).

According to this model of reality, the normative aim both for a social scientist interested in valid knowledge and for a social agent interested in effective action, is to create a community of inquiry [16, 19,20]. Such a community of inquiry would be characterized simultaneously by some specific product(s) or sevice(s) and by a continuing real-time inquiry into purposes, strategies, one's own practices, and outcomes, assessing their relative congruity or incongruity with each other [14]. The definition of organizational effectiveness for a community of inquiry would be congruity among purposes, strategies, practices, and outcomes, or, more simply, accomplishing what is intended.

Two of the territories open to research in a community of inquiry – the territory of purpose and the territory of one's own practice as one can experience it from within – are altogether disregarded in today's conventional scientific assumptions about knowledge. A variety of traditions, however, have concerned

Table 1
The four 'territories' open to research in a community of inquiry (as denoted in different 'languages')

In this paper	In organizations	In society	In personal terms	In terms of human attention	In science	In learning	In systems theory	In planning		
Outcomes in the visible outside world	Product or service	Historical events	Environmental responses to one's actions	Focal object	Data (or 'capta')	Active experimentation	(Outside world)	(Outside world)		
Own practice as sensed by self	Content of task	Roles	Perceptions, behavior	Focal awareness	Data gathering instruments	Concrete experience	Goal-directed feedback	Tactics	Goals	
Strategy, 'mapping' process	Formal and informal structures, processes	Norms	Cognitive-emotional-sensory structure (e.g., ego, id, superego)	Subsidiary awareness/ground	Logical theory	Reflective observation	Structural feedback	Strategies	Objectives	
Purpose, intentional attention	Policy	Values, myths [11]	Life-form, intuition, conscience, will [14]	Thread of intentionality/region [4,5,10,12]	Intuitive model [6]	Abstract generalization [7]	Consciousness [3]	Objectives (Texas Instruments)	Ideals [1]	

themselves with research into these territories. Ignatian prayer, Buddhist *vispasana* meditation, Hindu raja yoga, and Freudian and Jungian dream analysis can exemplify research disciplines which explore the territory of purpose at the individual scale. Certain theater exercises [13], the Eastern martial arts (notably *tai chi*), traditional instruction in crafts, and the Gurdjieffian sacred dances cultivate a sensual knowledge of one's own practice.

Given the notion of four distinct but interrelatable territories of experience, one can express the ultimate aim of collaborative inquiry as: integrating empirical, sensual, theoretical, and spiritual kinds of knowledge in effective action.

In keeping with the model of collaborative inquiry, the three informal faculty research seminars were not limited to theoretical discussion like that above. In addition to theoretical discussion, the seminars also included activities relating to each of the other kinds of research (empirical, sensual, and attentional): namely,

(1) the chance to criticize an 'effectiveness' interview schedule (later used to interview two-thirds of the full-time faculty) with regard to validity and reliability issues;

(2) the chance to participate in a tai chi dance exemplifying research on one's own practice; and

(3) the chance to engage in a meditation process inverting and widening one's attention to include simultaneous inquiry into purposes, strategies, one's own practice, and the outside world.

The faculty members present at the seminars raised many questions:

(1) is this model of inquiry a mechanism for self-deception?

(2) can awareness of personal or institutional incongruities across the domains of purposes, strategies, practices, and effects generate a demoralizing, paralyzing self-consciousness?

(3) won't people's short-term concerns and conflicting self-interests prevent the development of shared purposes?

(4) to explore these kinds of issues requires a fundamentally different kind of faculty meeting from our present ones: how can one imagine that happening here?

(5) is effectiveness really an issue that faculty members care about in their role as academics?

The alert, confronting nature of the questions could itself be taken as a clue about whether this model of inquiry generates a self-satisfied self-deception. Similarly, the unusual nature of the three research meetings themselves exemplified a new kind of faculty meeting.

The self-study process may have had its first significant impact on the school's overall effectiveness during these meetings. One meeting turned to a discussion of the likelihood that the school's faculty would act favorably on the major institutional initiative being developed at that time – a thorough-going revision of the MBA core curriculum which would focus it, not only on cultivating students' analytic and decision-making abilities, but also and pre-eminently on cultivating their capacities to take inquiring, effective, responsible action in managerial roles. There was great pessimism that the faculty would reject the initiative, no matter how cogent, because of a history of low trust during the previous administration. The public acknowledgement of this block and of the hopelessness it had generated over the past years, as well as the discussion of the collaborative consultative process through which the initiative would pass on the way to the faculty vote, seemed to generate renewed energy to support the initiative among those present (and those present were among the most active in school affairs). Even though several of those present were still unconvinced that the initiative would pass three months later on the day of the faculty vote, the meeting was in fact characterized by thoughtful, constructive discussion and a unanimous vote in favor of all thirteen proposed revisions.

During the six weeks following the initial research meetings, eleven of the faculty who has been present at the final meeting participated in the 'effectiveness' interview, as well as in a further research meeting to discuss the results of the interviews. Given the small proportion of faculty participating in this pilot set of interviews, the results permitted no defensible generalizations to the school as a whole. However, one specific finding generated considerable discussion at the feedback meeting and influenced the actions of the Dean and myself during the following year. This finding was the factor most often mentioned (by nine of the eleven respondents) as inhibiting the school's effectiveness. The following comments are all direct quotes from the interviews, in the format in which they were presented at the feedback session:

Factors Inhibiting Greater Effectiveness at SOM (in order of frequency of mention)

1. Climate of not doing much: a vicious circle
– a lot of things (e.g., EPC meetings) feel basically dead

- I don't sense that a large number of faculty want to move ahead
- we 'are not all saying we want to do it
- people have to want to be great, be willing to pay the price
- pervasive sense of mediocrity, general discouragement about
- negative self-concept about research production
- people here put themselves down, we have an organizational inferiority complex
- negative attitude that says you give up once you get here

During the year following this feedback session, the school's faculty approved not only the revised MBA core curriculum, but also two other significant innovations in the internal structure of the school. In addition, three new inter-institutional programs which relate the school more closely to the small business and high technology environment in the Boston area were developed. These opportunities would almost certainly not have developed had not the Dean and I been willing to devote considerable attention to them. And we, in turn, might well *not* have been willing to devote our attention to the inter-institutional possibilities had we not been concerned about how the replace a 'climate of not doing much' with more positive activity cycles. Thus, as incomplete as the pilot sets of interviews were, the data from them had a powerful impact, through the school's administrative leadership, on the school's relationship to its environment during the ensuing year, and the new levels of internal and inter-institutional initiative may have supplanted an institutional sense of "not doing much" with a sense of positive accomplishment.

This interpretation is supported by two sets of data:

(1) in the second round of interviews with twenty-five additional faculty members six months after the pilot interviews, the school was rated as significantly more effective than in the first round and anything like 'a climate of not doing much' was not mentioned as a factor inhibiting the school's effectiveness;

(2) when the eleven faculty originally interviewed in July 1979 were asked in July 1980 whether they viewed the school as more or less effective than a year earlier, none viewed it as less effective, two viewed it as essentially unchanged, and the other nine viewed it as more effective (average 3.97, where 3 equals 'same', 4 equals 'marginally more effective', and 5 equals 'markedly more effective').

All who viewed the school as more effective expressed qualifications, the most prominent of which were:

(1) that the innovations had yet to be proven;

(2) that although there was more activity, objectives still were not clear and shared; and

(3) that they might be confounding their own personal sense of having had a better year than the previous one with an institutional change.

I was initially concerned about the validity of the data I would collect on this question in brief phone or face-to-face interviews, especially given that I, as one of the school's administrators, would presumably hope to hear that the school was viewed as more effective than the previous year (and I mentioned this concern in a number of cases when I asked the question, as one way of exorcising this possible source of contamination). As the ten other faculty members responded to the question with the hesitation and qualifications suggested above, these very hesitations made me increasingly confident that their responses *did* represent genuine reflections and not merely 'socially desirable' comments. Afterwards, I realized that there was an additional reason for my confidence in the validity of this data. I asked myself how many of these ten persons had criticized or opposed initiatives of mine in the year between the two sets of questions about the school's effectiveness. If none or almost one of these persons had confronted me on any issues in the previous year, I reasoned that I ought to be suspicious of the validity of this 'positive' data on the grounds that my position or my personal style might be inhibiting others from reporting negative feedback to me. In fact, however, six of the ten did disagree with me about, and confront me on, at least one issue in the preceding year.

This discussion of the initial interviews and feedback process illustrates a number of the features of the collaborative inquiry model of science. First, the interview questions were mostly open-ended in order to give the respondents the opportunity to become committed to the study to the point of eventually developing a role as researchers as well as respondents. (Since that time eight other members of the faculty have played active roles in organizing research activities.) Because the object of collaborative inquiry is institutional (and hence, necessarily, personal) self-study, all stages of data collection, particularly the initial stages, are viewed not just as formal procedures for yielding valid results, but equally as actions which in their overall structure and moment-to-moment conduct either enhance or inhibit commitment to continued inquiry.

Second, the validity of the one finding reported above was tested not by a statistical procedure, but by calling forth concerted effort to influence the (alleged) condition. The peculiar twists given to the issue of validity in collaborative inquiry include the twist that the primary criterion of validity is not the statistical generalizability of findings to other settings, but rather their pertinence to the future increased effectiveness of the social system studied; and the twist that the primary critical public for the study is not the journal referees in one's scholarly field, but rather one's colleagues in the social system studied.

Finally, because the researchers in an institutional self-study are also actors in the system itself, their objectivity and impartiality is enhanced not by any attempt at detachment or neutrality, but rather by their ability to build trusting relationships which transmit truthful messages, by their receptivity to confrontation, and by their ability to read the nuances and implications between the lines of the explicit data they collect (the root of 'intelligence' is 'inter-lego', 'to read between').

The findings and feedback sessions relating to the second round of interviews are not reported here in more detail because of space limitations (a more detailed version of the entire self-study version is available upon request).

5. Second year of the self-study process

A dozen members of the Boston College School of Management faculty, along with another dozen members from other Boston area universities and businesses, have committed themselves to participate, during the 1980–81 year, in a continuing series of seminars on the topic *Responsible Self-Regulation: In Science, Society, and One's Own Circle*, aiming toward an edited book. Alternating between discussing theory and examining their own practice, they are working toward a model of social systems functioning which depends for regulation neither on an 'invisible hand' nor an a 'mailed fist', but rather on timely inquiry.

At the same time, certain outcomes from the previous year's initiatives are becoming apparent. The Graduate Division of the school has obtained its first significant unrestricted funds through a major grant for the revised core curriculum. Also, the total number and the overall quality of applications for admission have made stochastic leaps, as has the percentage of accepted applicants who choose to attend Boston College.

But the relationship between self-study and effective action is currently being explored and illustrated most intensely, perhaps, in the actual implementation of the restructured MBA core curriculum. In addition to their regular courses in the first semester (Accounting, Computer Science, Statistics, Economics, Organizational Behavior ...), all entering full-time students are required to meet for an Integrative Activity once each week and in heterogeneous study groups twice a week to cooperate as best they can in doing various course-related projects. The study groups are observed and receive feedback on such managerial skills as how to seek help, how to create an agenda, and how to confront and work through conflict.

The Integrative Activities are two-and-a-half-hour meetings which require no special preparation by students and are not graded in any way. Each week the topic and format are a surprise. All Integrative Activities involve the students as active participants in one way or another and all are intended to illustrate the need in real-time action to integrate the analytically distinguishable management disciplines. The example of one Integrative Activity can conclude the illustrations of self-study.

This particular week (six weeks into the newly restructured program, mid-October 1980) the entire group (90 students, 6 faculty) has just concluded a discussion of the Bill Agee–Mary Cunningham embroglio at Bendix. The final segment of Gail Sheehy's widely-syndicated five-part story of the events leading to Cunningham's rapid promotions to Vice-President for Corporate Strategy at Bendix and then to her sudden resignation after an annual employee meeting has just appeared this morning.

The topic has raised many issues of special relevance to this MBA program: Can major institutions change in profound ways or will their everyday 'politics' – including inertia, territoriality and jealousy – inevitably defeat the idealism of people like Agee and Cunningham? Can women advance rapidly into top executive roles and survive? Did Agee and Cunningham in fact act effectively and responsibly in their conduct of their public relationship? Is it really possible to discuss sensitive organizational issues in a constructive manner at large, public meetings and, if so, what are the skills of discretion, timing, and honesty involved? In short, is the dream so central to BC's

restructured MBA program – the dream of developing managers and institutions significantly more inquiring, more responsible and more effective than is typical at present – is this dream just a pipe dream? Or is it realizable? Can the BC MBA program really help to make this dream come true despite the difficulties illustrated by the Bendix case?

Although a number of students and faculty members have offered acute observations about the Bendix case, as well as suggestions about alternative strategies and actions that might have made a difference in the outcome, the basic questions raised above receive no authoritative, final answer during the intensely engaging hour's discussion.

After a short break, the Integrative Activity continues. The faculty member leading this part of the session tells everyone that we are now about to engage in a much more difficult and direct test of whether the BC MBA program can generate an institutional environment significantly more inquiring, more responsible, and more effective than is typical at present. We are also about to engage in a direct test of whether it is possible to discuss senstive organizational issues in a constructive manner at a large, public meeting. Then he proceeds to share with the assembly the results from a questionnaire about the new program filled out a few days before by most of the entering full-time students. With minimal interpretation, he presents the following data:

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF 10/9/80 QUESTIONNAIRE

Of our 90 full-time first year students, 68 submitted (anonymous) responses. While most of the questions were open-ended, we were able to compile the following frequency counts:

1. Eight-six percent (86%) said the MBA program has been more valuable than their most recent previous full-time educational experience. Seven percent (7%) reported the program was *as* valuable and 7% said it was *less* valuable.
2. Regarding work load, 44% found it too heavy, while 28% characterized it as heavy but manageable.
3. Comments on the study groups fell into categories of 'valuable' (53%), 'improving' (18%), 'valuable with reservations' (16%), and 'reservations only: (9%).
4. Seventy-five percent (75%) found the Integrative Activities valuable, and many gave suggestions for future activities.
5. When asked about the schedule, 47% found it satisfactory. Of those, some also included reservations. Another 43% mentioned possible changes only. The concern mentioned most often centered around difficulties with Tuesday/Thursday afternoon classes.
6. Open-ended comments were invited about each course. Thus, a student might offer a suggestion for changing a course and say nothing directly positive about its, even though he or she had predominantly positive feelings about the course. Within this format, 87% of those responding *did* offer positive comments on Accounting, Computer Science, and Organizational Studies. Sixty-five percent (65%) of those responding offered positive comments about Statistics and Perspectives on Management. Comments on Economics leaned more heavily towards suggestions only.

The reader will probably agree that the overall tone of these results is positive and confirming of the early weeks in the implementation of the new program. However, the data also show that the Economics course in particular is a serious source of concern to the students. In presenting these data to the assembly, the faculty member acknowledges this 'trouble area'. He lets the students know that the Economics professor (who is, of course, present, along with his colleagues) has already had numerous conversations with other faculty about these difficulties and has already reviewed the entire set of questionnaires. He reminds the students of the initiatives and risks which the faculty have taken and are taking in creating this opportunity for mutual criticism and improvement of the program (by contrast to the relatively risk-free role of the students to date in filling out anonymous questionnaires). And he closes by inviting a conversation which addresses whatever issues strike those present as most significant.

For the next forty-five minutes the speakers are mostly students, and they all address themselves to their experience of the Economics course, stating their difficulties very plainly and yet without antagonism. Often they explicitly say that they are not sure that their perspective is correct. The Economics professor does not speak, but the few other faculty comments make it clear that much of what the students find difficult about the professor's style is intentional on his part and based on a coherent philosophy of teaching. Towards the end of the discussion several students begin to examine the relative passivity that has characterized assumptions about their role as learners, as well as their actions in the weeks since they have been experiencing difficulties in the Economics course. After the session, the Economics professor makes a variety of small changes in the course, and the students seem exhilarated by a sense of self-discovery, by a sense of real progress on what is usually an intractable problem, but even more by the incontrovertible evidence of the commitment on the part of the faculty and administration to making the MBA program itself not just a rhetorical

advocate, but a practicing example of inquiring, responsible, effective management.

A natural question is why the Economics professor was willing to expose himself to the public evaluation involved in the meeting just described. One part of the answer is that he has participated throughout the other institutional self-study activities described earlier in this paper, becoming increasingly familiar with the process of constructive public discussion of sensitive institutional issues. Another part of the answer is that the core curriculum team members engaged during its planning meetings in a process of teaching one another and then receiving feedback on their teaching. A third part of the answer is that this faculty member chose to join the Boston College School of Management faculty twenty-five years ago because of his and its special commitment to values of colleagueship and teaching.

Another natural question is what motivates faculty members to plan and attend the weekly Integrative Activities? The answer is that the core team invented an administrative arrangement which mandates faculty members' attendance at one another's classes, at Integrative Activities such as the one described, and at the frequent 'Core Team' meetings. This arrangement is that faculty members teaching in the full-time core curriculum are credited as teaching three sections for every two they actually teach, on the condition that they undertake the additional duties just described. The new sections are also larger than the former average size (45 compared to 30) so that in teaching two sections in the restructured program, the MBA faculty member takes responsibility for the same number of students as he or she would have in teaching three sections before. Thus, the faculty involved are receiving no special favors. They are being rewarded for a different pattern of activities.

The strong commitment of the university as a whole to teaching and to meaningful integrative activities was illustrated when the Academic vice President (himself a Jesuit) gained and granted approval for the '3 for 2' administrative arrangement within twenty-four hours of receiving the proposal (and anyone familiar with academic will recognize how extraordinary that turnaround time is).

In process, the gait toward the Integrative Activity described above seemed stumbling and slow. Only a brief, retrospective summary like this one can convey the impression of a logic swift and sure. Nevertheless, there is a 'logic-in-practice' – a certain pattern of activity – for which institutional supports have been developed and to which members of the core faculty team have been increasingly committing themselves for the previous two years. This initially implicit logic becomes fully explicit during this Integrative Activity as the faculty begins to introduce the MBA students to the risks and skills and benefits of achieving more effective execution through a carefully structured and caringly conducted collaborative inquiry – through an ongoing institutional self-study. The structure of the session represented a 'choreography of time' through which the national significance of the Bendix case, the institutional significance of the data feedback about the new program, and the personal significance for each participant of acting openly, honestly, and with dignity during the discussion itself reinforced and illuminated each other.

It is this central yet gradual commitment to modeling a process of inquiring, responsible, effectual, timely action *in its own ongoing implementation* that is beginning to distinguish the Boston College MBA program from most contemporary business and educational environments. Whatever other errors may have occurred in the Bendix case, one error was certainly the effort to conduct a public inquiry into a sensitive organizational issue in the absence of carefully cultivated commitments to, and skills at, conducting a real-time collaborative inquiry – the absence of a continuing institutional self-study. Yet so long as the skills of self-study-in-action and of effective execution are *not* cultivated, 'organizational politics' will remain a term of opprobrium, as well as a process which distracts participants from task accomplishment and which contributes to institutional *in*effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the foregoing skeletal review of the first and second years of an institutional self-study process at the Boston College School of Management indicates movement through two phases of development toward a possible third phase. This movement may be generalizable to other institutional self-study projects [20]. Because the entire paradigm of collaborative inquiry is generally unfamiliar, institutional members must first:

(1) develop an initial familiarity with, and willingness to explore further, the overall model of inquiry and effectiveness; in the Boston College case, through activities such as the initial research seminars and feedback sessions

of the first year of self-study; then

(2) develop a 'taste' for, and skills at, identifying and correcting major unclarities about, and incongruities among, purposes, strategies, operations, and outcomes; in the Boston College case, through activities like the seminar on Responsible Self-Regulation and the implementation of revised MBA core curriculum in the second year of the self-study; and then only as a still later phase

(3) develop the skill and commitment to seek moment-to-moment and word-to-word precision and high quality outcomes in terms of analytic validity, aesthetic appropriateness, and political timeliness.

In any given institution, one can imagine a widening series of such cycles, beginning with a few people motivated to become a self-study group, then widening to include one or more task-related sub-groups at the institution, etc. The self-study process oscillates between invitations to new groups to join in self-study and periods of concentration wherein committed participants seek to institutionalize the self-study process within their own activities and reflections. At each new phase of 'widening', the question is confronted whether participants in the self-study process have developed only a new rhetoric or actually a new mode of practice. If only a new rhetoric about "collaborative inquiry" has developed, then one can predict that the self-study process will encounter serious resistance in the next phase (e.g., other members of the organization will not be motivated to give this process a try).

According to the model of administrative leadership presented near the outset of this paper, the self-study process is rightly conceived as a very long-term process. As the initiating researcher in this case, I am frankly surprised that after only a year and a half the self-study process at the Boston College School of Management appears already to have had some constructive impact on the institution. Certainly, though, the self-study process cannot yet be said to have 'taken root' at the school as a widely valued activity. And, of course, there is no evidence whatsover yet that other institutions will explore or come to value this process.

The explicit self-study activities reported in this paper are but one spring feeding the much larger river of institutional activities at the Boston College School of Management. This particular spring is undoubtedly of much greater significance to the author of this paper than to anyone else at Boston College at the present time. Thus, it may well be that the primary effect of the leadership conceptions and the self-study activities described here has been to keep this one administrator preoccupied for two years in a relatively harmless fashion so that he has not obstructed the positive institutional developments that have taken place. If other administrators preoccupy themselves in this way for a quarter of their time, who knows what mischief their institutions may be spared!

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